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THE AIM AND SCOPE OF CIVICS.

THAT civics has not yet "found itself" is no cause for wonder. The word is only about fifteen years old and the thing is even younger. The crudities of youth alone would prevent civics from being as yet a definite and scientifically arranged body of knowledge. But another circumstance retards its crystallization. The dominant theme of civics is citizenship, and "citizenship" is a term so broad and comprehensive that it is extremely difficult to assign to it a sharp and distinct meaning. Our ideas about civics cannot be clear while our notions about citizenship are blurred. When we analyze our citizenship, we find that it is implicated in almost every human relation. There is a citizenship of the home, a citizenship of the church—St. Paul speaks of citizens of the household of God, a citizenship of the market-place, a citizenship of the polling-booth. Good citizenship consists in right living in all these relations. To train for good citizenship—which, we are told in season and out of season, is the chief function of the school—is therefore a most ambitious task. To train for good citizenship is to train for domestic virtues, for spiritual graces, for social decorum, for industrial rectitude, for political righteousness. Now, if "civics" is the name of the subject that is to furnish this plenary training, beyond doubt a great deal of heterogeneous matter must be included under that term.

Evidently there is need for precision and clarification in this matter of civics. We may begin with the word "citizenship" which is pressed into service so often. Such an excellent phrase as "training for citizenship" should not be permitted to degenerate into cant because of its vagueness and thus become a sweet morsel for the educational demagogue. Citizenship, when referred to as the subject-matter of civics, ought to be rigidly delimited to political citizenship. When we say that the school should prepare for good citizenship, it will conduce to clearness of purpose if we stipulate that the training in question

shall refer to the political side. If we will make systematic and prolonged attempts in the schools to prepare our pupils for an intelligent and conscientious performance of the political duties which await them, we may succeed in our aim, and if we should succeed on a large scale in such an undertaking, the phrase "training for citizenship" would have a vitality which it certainly does not now possess. Let civics then be focused upon the citizenship of the polling-booth, and let its aim be to prepare for an intelligent and conscientious discharge of the political duties which devolve upon a citizen.

What is involved in such an aim? What is it to be prepared for one's political duty? I suppose, if a man is to discharge his political duty well, he must (1) be imbued with the spirit of the political institutions of his country; (2) understand the machinery of the government under which he lives; (3) possess precise knowledge respecting current political problems; (4) cherish sound notions respecting questions of political morality. If his equipment is satisfactory in all these respects it may be predicted confidently, providing his will and conscience are what they ought to be, that his political action will be what it ought to be. If he is palpably defective in any of the above four points, his political conduct may easily go wide of the mark. Instruction in civics, then, should cover these four points: (1) it should impart the spirit of our political institutions; (2) it should explain our political organization; (3) it should acquaint the learner with those facts and principles that underlie the great political questions of the day; (4) it should teach a robust political morality.

1. *The spirit*.—What is it to impart the spirit of an institution? How, for example, may a class in civics acquire the true spirit of the most significant of all American political institutions, the institution of democracy, or majority rule? Let the class drink deeply of the knowledge of the subject; let it learn as much and think as much as possible about democracy. Let it dwell upon the theme until the history of democracy is known, until its purposes are clearly perceived, until its nature and attributes are appreciated. To understand the dignity and

strength of democracy the learner must go back to the time when the voice of the people first began to be heard among men, and must trace through the centuries the growth of the democratic principle, bringing the account up to the period when the people became the real masters of government throughout the civilized world. Such a story, properly unfolded, would engender a respect for popular government, for it would show that democracy is a persistent and indestructible force in human affairs. Respect of this kind is entirely wholesome and desirable. For weal or for woe, democracy has become the greatest force in politics, and there is not the slightest reason to believe that its power will ever decline, and no good can come from underestimating its strength or distrusting its permanency. The seamy side of democracy should be exposed. It should be shown that majorities can be more cruel and unjust than monarch ever dared to be, and that the cruelty and injustice of a majority are more intolerable and grievous than the cruelty and injustice of a despot. The dangers and enemies of democracy should be pointed out and its archenemy, the demagogue, should be so fully described that in after years the learner would not fail to detect one of those creatures in whatever guise he should appear. Most important of all, it ought to be made plain in the civics class that, if democracy is to be an instrument of happiness to mankind, the individuals composing a state must lead worthy lives. The great truth that citizenship in a democracy means personal responsibility, personal service, personal sacrifice, should be presented in a score of ways, and should be dwelt upon until it sinks deep into the recesses of the heart and mind, and becomes a conviction, and the pupil feels that the greatest contribution he can make to the cause of good government is to order his own life aright. When a pupil has attained to this mastery of the subject, when he knows the past of democracy, when he appreciates its aims, when he is aware of its weaknesses as well as of its virtues, and when he realizes his personal responsibility as a citizen of a democracy, then has he caught the spirit of democracy, and the civics work, to this extent has been worth while.

Democracy, of course, is only one of the great themes. Almost equally important are the topics of representation, "checks and balances," constitutionalism, federalism, local autonomy, civil liberty. These are the foundation stones upon which our political fabric is reared, and a liberal allotment of time and space to these at the outset begets an appreciation of the leading ideas of free government, and this appreciation vitalizes the work in all its subsequent stages. Without an understanding of the underlying principles—mark the word—of our government its spirit cannot be known, and without the spirit the form is a cold and lifeless thing. It is of the highest importance, then, that our instruction in civics should lay the foundation with the greatest care and patience. A dictionary definition of a democracy will not suffice; a line or a paragraph on representative government will not elucidate the great principles of representation; a lesson on the formation of the constitution may fail utterly to teach what constitutional government is.

2. *The form.*—A knowledge of the machinery of government, especially of the machinery of the American government, is indispensable. If our state and federal relations are to be preserved, voters must understand them. But political organization is not the only, or even the most important, element in civics. The skeleton of the body politic should be studied, but not at the expense of the arteries and nerves and tissues. Here is where our teaching of civics is often at fault. We teach civil government and call it civics. We devote our time to departments and bureaus, to offices and officers, to functions and functionaries. We have our pupils learn all the parts of all the governments from the township up to the nation, and in the acquisition of this knowledge they come to look upon civics as the driest, the most unprofitable, and the most stupid of all their studies. And their impressions are often just. The end and aim of much of the instruction that passes under the name of civics is to teach the facts of the political organization, and when this is the guiding principle civics must be insufferably prosy and unprofitable.

3. *Current political topics.*—The political questions of the hour

relate to taxation, to the currency, to international policies, to colonization, to banking, to the tariff, to industry on the capitalistic side, to industry from the view-point of the laborer, to penology, to the police power, to the sphere and functions of government, to municipal betterment, to reform in expressing the popular will. Civil government of the orthodox type either avoids these topics altogether or deals very warily and stingily with them. But civics is more than civil government. Civics professes to prepare for intelligent voting; it must therefore take up the questions upon which voters are invited to express an opinion and give these questions a serious and adequate treatment.

Doubts may arise as to the wisdom of discussing in the classroom such themes as strikes and trusts and the currency. It may be thought that these subjects are too closely identified with practical politics to be allowed a place in civics. There is really no inherent difficulty in this direction, if the teacher knows the subject and is capable of looking at a question in a fair and just way. It was my privilege once to be present at the hearing of a recitation in a high school when the subject of the lesson was the tariff. A presidential campaign was raging at the time, and the tariff was the supreme issue. The school was located in a manufacturing region, and the community was deeply agitated by the discussions in the press and on the hustings. The lesson had hardly begun before it was very apparent that the class was divided into rampant free traders and rampant protectionists. Nothing was discoverable, however, as to the views of the teacher. Without even the appearance of partisanship, he went about his work in that straightforward matter-of-fact way which is characteristic of one searching for truth. The text-book used by the class stated the facts and arguments connected with the tariff in a scientific manner, and these were studied by teacher and pupils in a scientific spirit. The pupils learned the leading truths about the history and purpose and effect of tariffs. Some of these truths were, of course, against the free traders and some were against the protectionists. The free traders learned what was to be said on the protectionists'

side, and the protectionists learned the arguments of the free traders. Throughout the lesson the teacher's fair-mindedness did not desert him for an instant, and this candid, unbiased attitude won success for the recitation. The lesson may not have resulted in any conversions from one side of the question to the other, but it did result in an increase of knowledge and soberness and clearness of thought.

If our civic teaching will do this much, if it will equip the learners with a substantial outfit of knowledge relating to current political topics, and will train them to think clearly about these topics, we need not worry about the voting. Whether my pupils in civics will vote the Democratic ticket or the Republican ticket is a matter of no concern to me, but it is a matter of concern to me that they know something about the subjects upon which they vote and that they put into their vote at least as much thought as they are accustomed to bestow upon matters of equal importance. If I shrink from these practical questions of the hour and leave my pupils ignorant of the very facts which voters must have if they are to vote rationally, I shrink from a most important part of my task. It is true, these live political topics, like live electric wires, are dangerous and must be handled with great caution; yet they must be handled, and, like the expert electrician, the teacher should have knowledge and should exercise care.

4. *Political morality.*—There is hardly a subject in politics that has not its ethical side, and if this side is neglected the teacher is losing his greatest opportunity. Constantly we find men sinning politically, not because their hearts are bad or because their wills are weak, but because their ethical standards are low, and these are low because they have never been elevated by education. "He acts as well as he knows how." Men, for example, sometimes give bribes because they have no cogent appreciation of the flagitiousness of bribery; because they have never clearly apprehended the grim-visaged truth that the bribe not only debauches him that gives and him that takes, but that it poisons the whole body of society. A little enlightenment in political ethics will often improve the political conduct. Will

such enlightenment *always* improve the political conduct? Will instruction on the ethical side of political subjects generally result in the improvement of the political conduct of the learner? No educational question can have more interest than this: What is the answer to it? If the instructor in civics is himself an ethical success, he may saturate his work with morality and feel confident of a reward. If he is himself a bad or an indifferent citizen, any seeds of ethical instruction sown by him will probably fall among the thorns and be choked. A moral precept must have a sanction. In the public schools, under our system, the sanction of religion cannot be combined with maxims of conduct, and the only available sanction must come from the teacher himself—from his life, from his character, from his citizenship. If the teacher of civics is an able man, his work will be vivified by the emotion and enthusiasm of his own lofty soul and his precepts, having the sanction of incarnate character, will lodge in the consciences of his pupils and result in right action. If the teacher is not the incarnation of his teachings, if he cannot give the sanction of his own character to his precepts, he might as well abandon the idea of ethical culture, for his maxims will be "moral diagrams" and nothing more; and if he is compelled to eliminate the moral element, he might as well go the rest of the way and close the civics book altogether. To vote right requires a happy union of head and heart, and if instruction in civics does not effect this union, as likely as not its chief result will be to prepare many of the learners for more successful and intelligent careers as public rogues.

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